

LITERARY MAGAZINES AND BRITISH ROMANTICISM

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Introduction: the study of literary magazines

This book seeks to do three things: to demonstrate that literary magazines should be an object of study in their own right, to argue that they are the preeminent literary form of the 1820s and 1830s in Britain, and to explore the ways in which literary magazines begin to frame a discussion of Romanticism. To do so, I have taken five instances from the four most prominent magazines of the time: the *London Magazine* from 1820 to 1821, the *New Monthly* from 1821 to 1825, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* from 1822 to 1825, and *Fraser's Magazine* from 1833 to 1834. The first two of these instances are more traditionally author-centered, treating Charles Lamb's Elia essays and William Hazlitt's Table-Talk essays in the *London*. The third comes from the pages of *Blackwood's*, whose "Noctes Ambrosianae" constitutes one of the great experiments within the form of the magazine. The fourth takes up the *New Monthly*, perhaps the most consciously and purposefully homogeneous of the great magazines. The final instance, the run of *Fraser's* containing Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, signals the limit to this period of intense creativity in magazine production and writing. In most considerations of this literature, the essay or poem is to the magazine as figure is to ground in the plastic arts; it is my hope that by dissolving the figures of Elia and the author of Table-Talk into the ground of Scott's *London*, by examining the shifting relation of figure to ground in the *New Monthly* and the playful reversals of such notions in "Noctes," and by observing the emergence of Carlyle's *Sartor* from the ground of magazine writing generally, we can begin to appreciate the importance of the magazine in the literary history of the period we have come to call Romantic.

Such an analysis requires the development of two key terms, context and politics. Context is the more difficult term, as it can mean the immediate environment of the other contributions in a given number of a magazine, the tenor or feel of a particular magazine, magazines and periodical literature more generally, or the wider social world within which

magazines move. Context can also be produced by the relations between editor and contributor: overtly in the commissioning of a particular article or essay, in negotiations about the product, and through editorial changes; covertly in the silent adjustments contributors might make in fitting their work to a specific magazine. All of these versions of context are necessary to a study of literary magazines, but, as they are invoked at different times and with different force, their application varies considerably. The work of politics in literary magazines is less various and more subtle. Magazines such as *Blackwood's*, the *London*, the *New Monthly*, and *Fraser's* are conventionally categorized as Tory, Whig, or apolitical, but these tags tell us remarkably little. The literary magazines of this study offer surprisingly clear and self-conscious meditations on politics considered in the largest sense, as having to do with the nation as a whole. Considered together, these meditations provide a coherent and progressive argument about the way in which politics might be conceived and discussed.

The present chapter is offered as an introduction to the study of literary magazines. It specifically addresses those of the late Romantic period in England, but I believe that it raises critical issues basic to the study of literary magazines generally. The real difficulty in pursuing this project has been the lack of an existing conceptual framework for the study of literary magazines, or even a reliable description of the materials. This has forced a more inductive approach than might be taken in other kinds of studies, which can situate themselves among or against many recent good critical books. I am mindful that literary history has no self-evident and implicit meaning; it is not an empirical process, nor a recitation of facts. Nevertheless, it relies on empirical evidence, which it is the work of theory or interpretation to employ or set aside. At this point in the study of periodicals, the more we proceed inductively, the better, so long as we consider "induction" and "empiricism" as relative, not absolute states. The choice of the years between 1820 and 1834 and four middle-class magazines might seem eccentric, given the proliferation of magazine and periodical work in terms of new titles, of circulation numbers, and of audiences during that period and through the rest of the century. But I intend to show that a confluence of social, cultural, and literary factors make this early period in the history of literary magazines the most experimental, the most self-conscious, and, at least for the student of periodicals, one of the most telling.

As they have become more complex, magazines and periodicals have been less an object of study than an adjunct to literary investigation. Periodicals that are essentially single essays, such as Addison and Steele's

Tatler and *Spectator*, Johnson's *Rambler*, and Goldsmith's *Citizen of the World*, receive close attention. But when periodicals take on a more modern form – collaborations of many hands with an editor – they are treated largely as an archive from which scholars draw evidence to use in other arguments. Typically, scholars cite negative reviews in magazines to establish the newness or revolutionary qualities of Romantic writing (the familiar rehearsal of Francis Jeffrey's response to Wordsworth's *Excursion*, "This will never do," might stand as the type of this critical move). More often magazines are simply ignored in critical discussions. Few treatments of De Quincey's "Confessions of an English Opium Eater," for example, do more than mention the *London*, although that magazine, which had made a point of recounting and analyzing unusual psychological experiences, had much to do with preparing for the initial, unexpected success of this work. And while such compilations of magazine material as *The Romantics Reviewed*¹ have made reception histories easier to trace and the critical mood of the period easier to apprehend, scholars still tend to view magazines and periodicals merely as collections of discrete articles, as a system for delivering individual literary works or critical opinion that is itself disposable.

This critical tendency is unfortunate. What is lost in reading individual contributions outside the orbit of the periodical is not simply an immediate context for the work but a mode of emergence which radically affects the meaning of a particular essay, review, poem, or novel. A writer's intentions are only part of the meaning of the work in a periodical: a work in such a setting enters a variety of relations with other articles and ongoing institutional concerns that give subtle inflection to its meaning. This irreducible rhetoricity takes many forms: appeals to what often goes without saying in a particular magazine or review, innuendo familiar to its circle of readers, exaggeration discernible only by reference to the standard line of the periodical. The periodical does not simply stand in secondary relation to the literary work it contains; a dynamic relation among contributions informs and creates meaning.

Recapturing the world of the magazine involves substantial difficulties. To begin with, the sheer abundance of magazine writing, even in so small a part of the nineteenth century as this study proposes, is daunting. Michael Wolff's estimate that between twenty-five and fifty million articles appeared in Victorian periodicals is disturbing for its inexactness as well as its magnitude.² The concept of "information overload" is a commonplace to us, but Hazlitt and De Quincey wrote essays premised upon it. Of course, we might balance this rebarbative aspect of periodical research against Carlyle's matter-of-fact claim that, upon

receiving the back issues of the *Edinburgh Review* (not an unusual gift from a publisher to a new contributor), he read them straight through, or the ambitious project set out by James Mill and his son John to review the first twenty-two years of the *Edinburgh Review* for the first few numbers of the *Westminster Review*. Such feats, however, are likely to provide faint inspiration for the modern researcher.

Moreover, the complexity of periodicals makes them formidable. To read a magazine such as *Blackwood's* or the *London* is to be plunged into a world of diurnal reference and innuendo largely lost to us. Nearly all periodicals in the 1820s trade in "personality," or rancorous personal attack, and by nature such writing is elusive and topical. What goes without saying, especially in magazines, has heightened importance at a time of stringent libel laws and active state censorship. In addition, each magazine labors to develop a specialized frame of reference, in which certain names or topics can trigger the reader's recollection of earlier material. For instance, the mere mention of "Leigh Hunt" in *Blackwood's* suggests some bullyragging to follow: it allows the reader to anticipate a certain kind of carnivalesque entertainment. "Hunt" functions as a master trope, which not only characterizes other writers and situations but embodies a particular view of the literary world. Moreover, not all such uses of charged language are so easily recoverable: perhaps the more decisive term of belletristic denigration in *Blackwood's* is "Tims," an idiosyncratic nickname for Patmore that has more subtle connotations of effete and ineffectual writing.

In fact, almost no aspect of periodical study is unproblematic. Almost all Romantic magazines (and all those taken up in this study) present their contributions anonymously or under a pseudonym. Scholarly efforts, which have been directed at attribution, have been extended and codified by the *Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals*.³ This monumental work of many years and many hands would seem, at first glance, to ease some of the difficulties for students of magazines by providing the means for a classification which affords powerful ways of discriminating among individual contributions. Of course, one might have reservations about this kind of author-centered methodology, just as one might, from a more traditional perspective, have some doubts about the relative uncertainty of some of the attributions. But more problematic is the way in which the form of the magazine itself undermines either an exclusively author-centered or an exclusively poststructural approach. It is a critical commonplace that reviewers write with the force of the magazine or review behind them, that Gifford or Lockhart, in attacking Keats, write

with the weight of the *Quarterly* or *Blackwood's* behind them. Yet it is also a critical commonplace that editors routinely changed and at times substantially rewrote contributions. Moreover, we know that contributors wrote for particular periodicals, shaping their remarks for the particular tenor of a magazine or review. Their intentions, apparently, would be to produce something like the "discourse" of poststructuralism. Therefore we have a range of modalities within periodicals, from relative authorial autonomy to collaborations between editor and contributor. In between we have elusive hybrids: collaborations before the fact, in which the contributor tunes his remarks to the key of the magazine; works of many hands, such as Hazlitt's continuation of John Scott's "Living Authors" after Scott's death; and deliberate submission of fragments to be sutured together by the editor, such as *Blackwood's* "Noctes Ambrosianae." An author-centered approach leaves us vulnerable to the deconstruction of agency inherent in contributions by multiple hands; if we consider periodicals as "discourse," we run afoul of the intentionality of this consciously anonymous production.

These two critical approaches are set out in contemporary assessments of periodicals by Hazlitt and James Mill, the former writing for the well-established *Edinburgh Review* and the latter in the first number of the radical *Westminster*. A comparison of these two accounts by two working writers has much to tell us about the advantages and drawbacks of each.

Hazlitt's 1823 "The Periodical Press" begins with a question: whether periodical criticism is good for literature. His response, once he has named Wordsworth and Scott as proof that writers can write well despite the immediate judgment of periodicals, is to turn his attention to periodical writing itself:

we will content ourselves with announcing a truism on the subject, which, like many other truisms, is pregnant with deep thought, – viz. *That periodical criticism is favourable – to periodical criticism*. It contributes to its own improvement – and its cultivation proves not only that it suits the spirit of the times, but it advances it. It certainly never flourished more than at present. It never struck its roots so deep, nor spread its branches so widely and luxuriantly. Is not the proposal of this very question a proof of its progressive refinement? and what, it may be asked, can be desired more than to have the perfection of one thing at any one time?⁴

The question posed by Hazlitt echoes through the Romantic period; it is connected with the decline of the epic and the "burden of the past" perceived by so many writers of the age.⁵ Hazlitt's answer, under his

characteristically smart magazine contributor's opening, is a surprising one: he implies that periodical writing is itself something of a literary genre, and that, at this moment in the sweep of literary history, in the rise and fall of genres and kinds of literature, the periodical has taken precedence. Hazlitt then focuses on the situation of the periodical writer:

Literary immortality is now let on short leases, and we must be contented to succeed by rotation . . . We exist in the bustle of the world, and cannot escape from the notice of our contemporaries. We must please to live, and therefore should live to please. We must look to the public for support. Instead of solemn testimonies from the learned, we require the smiles of the fair and the polite. If princes scowl upon us, the broad shining face of the people may turn to us with a favourable aspect. Is not this life (too) sweet? Would we change it for the former if we could? But the great point is, that *we cannot!* Therefore, let Reviews flourish – let Magazines increase and multiply – let the Daily and Weekly Newspapers live for ever! (“The Periodical Press,” p. 358)

This is a complicated passage, both in its sensitivity to its historical moment and in its rhetoric. On the one hand, Hazlitt gives an insider's view of the historical shift from literary production under a patronage system to production based on a market. But Hazlitt also indulges in a not uncharacteristic touch of Coriolanian spleen at this change. His distrust of the reading public and his uneasiness at being judged by the “fair and polite” instead of the “learned” are evident. He further complicates the passage with a glancing quotation of the Duke Senior in Shakespeare's *As You Like It* – an exile who has bought philosophical insight and resignation with the loss of power and position.⁶

Like the Duke, however, Hazlitt manages to find sweet uses in adversity. Anticipating De Quincey's argument in his 1848 essay “Literature of Knowledge and Literature of Power,” Hazlitt sets out the present task for intellectuals:

To dig to the bottom of a subject through so many generations of authors, is now impossible: the concrete mass is too voluminous and vast to be obtained in any single head; and therefore we must have essences and samples as substitutes for it. We have collected a superabundance of raw materials: the grand *desideratum* now is, to fashion and render them portable. Knowledge is no longer confined to the few; the object therefore is, to make it accessible and attractive to the many. The *Monarchism* of literature is at an end; the cells of learning are thrown open, and let in the light of universal day. (p. 358)

Hazlitt then turns to various periodicals, commenting unsystematically, idiosyncratically, and at times mysteriously on the tenor of and often the

personalities behind each. The strength of his article lies in its clarification of the situation of the periodical writer, considered historically: the effects of the shift from patron to market audience, of the newly professional status of writers, and of the new status of the periodical as a genre or kind of literature. Throughout, Hazlitt is alive to the nuance and innuendo particular to the periodical world, as one might expect of a writer who had been immersed in its invective, its public squabbles, and its attendant legal actions.

When Hazlitt turns to individual magazines, however, the limitations of his insider's view are apparent. His stated topic was "The Periodical Press," but what follow are brief characterizations of individual magazines, most of which turn on the perceived disposition of the editor or some prominent contributor. So strong is Hazlitt's bias toward personalities that the clarity of his remarks suffers, at least for readers unfamiliar with the contemporary periodical scene. In his discussion of magazines, for instance, *Blackwood's* is not mentioned by name, except as one "extremity of the series" (p. 369). It does not figure at all in his treatment of leading magazines. Only later, when he addresses the scurrility rife in periodical discourse, does Hazlitt turn to *Blackwood's*, and here too not by name. There are several reasons for this elusive treatment: the Whig *Edinburgh*, for which Hazlitt is writing, had been involved in a running dispute with the Tory *Blackwood's*, and its editor, Francis Jeffrey, was often ridiculed personally in the pages of the latter. (His size was a common target: in a witty reworking of Walter Scott's nickname, "The Great Unknown," he was dubbed "the small known.") Hazlitt himself had been caught up in *Blackwood's* "Cockney School" attacks (among other things, he had been called "a pimple," and he had taken legal action against the magazine for libel). Hazlitt's analysis of the periodical world derives its power and insight from his engaged position as periodical writer, but that very experience entangles him with the current scene and precludes sustained reflection upon it. "The Periodical Press," enmeshed as it is in the working world of the periodical writer, cannot step outside it for long.

James Mill's 1824 "Periodical Literature" could not be more different. Mill's article – forty pages of dense quotation and analysis – is sober where Hazlitt is playful, and it counters Hazlitt's rhetorical flights with an austere and measured prose. Mill takes the stance of an outsider, one who brings to bear "a regular and systematic course of criticism"⁷ to the largely unexamined world of periodical writing. His main point is to demonstrate that the political affiliation of the *Edinburgh Review* motivates

its characteristic contradictions. As one might expect, Mill uses a Benthamite chain of reasoning, beginning with axiomatic statements and moving inexorably toward conclusions. The article opens with a powerful attack on both Whig and Tory politics: behind their seeming antagonism lies a shared interest in retaining the *status quo*. Rather than reform, the Whigs simply want the financial benefits that the governing Tories command. Although representing an exclusively aristocratic interest, they are forced to address another audience, the middle class, in hopes of regaining political influence. This forces them into a double pleading, characterized by recourse to vague language, championing of superficial reform, and what Mill calls the “see-saw” – the opportunistic embrace of both sides of an argument. Throughout the article, Mill considers the *Edinburgh Review* solely as a monolithic discourse. He respects neither the bounds of individual articles nor the possible distinctions of authorship; the “motives which must govern the class,” not those which “actuate individuals” (“Periodical Literature,” p. 217), are Mill’s concern. Hazlitt’s analysis turns upon the lived situation of periodical literature – what the audience demands, what constrains the writer, what the present situation enforces – and the aesthetic aspects of this kind of writing. Mill’s analysis is above all a critique of ideology: critical, disinterested, dismissive of individual cases and personal agency.⁸

But just as Hazlitt’s strength, his intimate knowledge of the nuance and innuendo of periodical writing, limits his analysis, Mill’s penchant for abstraction creates systematic blindnesses within his work. In the axiomatic stage of his analysis, he posits that the *Edinburgh Review* is “addressed to the aristocratical classes” (p. 210). Such a formulation, as an insider like Hazlitt would surely know and as Mill’s own analysis later implies, is much too simple. If the review is addressed to aristocrats, what Mill describes as the characteristic voice of the *Edinburgh Review* and the Whig constituency, a “double pleading” to the aristocratic opposition and the middle classes, is surely out of place. Throughout the Regency, the *Edinburgh Review* boasted circulations of 12,000–14,000, and these remained high over the next decade as well. Such penetration of the market goes well beyond the two hundred or so aristocratic families (according to Mill’s own count) that have or aspire to political power in Britain. Even if one figures in what Mill terms the “props” and “servants” of the aristocracy – the church and the legal professions, each of whom “receives its share of the profits of misrule” (p. 214) – it is unclear what the point of the *Edinburgh Review*’s “double pleading” might be. Aristocrats and their “props” would presumably need no persuading to

protect their own interests. In critiquing an ideology, Mill overlooks the complexities of both author and audience – the rhetorical situation implicit in the form of the magazine. Hazlitt is alive to the intricacies of voicing in periodical writing; Mill is virtually tone-deaf. Where Hazlitt recognizes the personal agency that pervades periodical writing, the bustling, individualist spirit of this sector of the ascendent professional middle class, Mill speaks impersonally of classes of men and their inevitable interests.

The best recent scholarly treatments of magazines closely follow the two approaches set out by Mill and Hazlitt. Jon Klancher takes Mill's more abstract line in the second chapter of *The Making of English Reading Audiences, 1790–1832*, and Peter Murphy in "Impersonation and Authorship in Romantic Britain" recalls Hazlitt's more situational and concrete position.⁹ Each account displays the strengths and limitations that characterize its predecessor.

Klancher, like Mill, begins with an analytic thesis about the audience formed by middle class journals such as *Blackwood's* and the *New Monthly*. Such discourse, he argues, constitutes a "representation in which the British middle class could become more acutely conscious of itself" (*Making of English Reading Audiences*, p. 49). He supports this claim by providing a typology of the means used by particular magazines to achieve this self-consciousness. *Blackwood's*, for example, celebrates "the power of mind itself" (p. 55) and "the ultimately contentless activity of the mind's self-discovery" (p. 60). This "positive hermeneutic" (p. 60) is balanced and opposed by the "negative hermeneutic" of the *New Monthly*, which seeks to make "its middle-class audience the adroit manager of all sign systems in which it might be ensnared" (p. 62). The rhetoric that characterizes *Blackwood's* reaches beyond signs, while that of the *New Monthly* empties signs of meaning, but both magazines programmatically seek to develop the self-consciousness of their readers.

The strengths of such a critique are readily apparent. Few readers would counter Klancher's basic assertion that middle-class magazines and journals of the period are tireless promoters of intellect and mind, and his account of the various "hermeneutics" developed in such periodicals is trenchant and informative – perhaps all the more so as the analysis and study of non-fictional prose has lagged behind other scholarship of the Romantic period. But, as in the case of Mill, Klancher's argument omits much of the specifics of reading such magazines as *Blackwood's* and the *New Monthly*. Klancher's focus on this particular "transauthorial discourse" (p. 52) comes at the expense of other features

of magazines, notably the complexities of the relation between magazine and reader. The particular “hermeneutics” he cites are present in the pages of the magazines, but they compete with other ways of understanding the world explicit and implicit in other articles. For instance, the “full-blown ideology of the power of mind” (p. 55) traced by Klancher is complicated in *Blackwood's* by the looming figure of Christopher North, who revels in intellectual pursuits but celebrates the purely physical pleasures as well. (One might note that when John Wilson takes up the “Noctes Ambrosianae” in 1825 he routinely balances mind, in the figure of De Quincey, with body, in the figure of the Ettrick Shepherd.) The “ideology of mind,” like many other concerns taken up by magazines, is in play, and as such its importance is subject to interpretation by readers and intervention by contributors and editors.

Secondly, Klancher's analysis, like Mill's, considers the basic unit of analysis to be the periodical considered in its entirety (at least over the period his analysis sets out) and at once. The discourse of *Blackwood's* is not only “transauthorial” but, at least within the period under discussion, timeless as well. Hence perhaps the basic feature of a periodical, its periodicity, disappears, along with the particularly agile historicity often displayed in a succession of numbers. The “negative hermeneutic” of the *New Monthly*, for instance, does not have the same value or meaning over time in the magazine. Its application is by turns liberating and depressing, and it is capable of enforcing a heightened sense of engagement with the social world as well as withdrawal from it. In essence, Klancher has chosen semiology over rhetoric in his analysis. Consequently, while his consideration of reading audiences is sensitive to larger historical shifts, his treatment of periodicals, this most diachronic of literary forms, is unexpectedly synchronic.

Murphy's method, like Hazlitt's, turns from the consideration of magazines as a static archive of authorless “discourse” to an intricate account of the agency of individual contributors and the occasions on which they acted. If Klancher's critique sets out the innuendo of periodical discourse, Murphy's essay is concerned with the inflections found in the magazines of Romantic Britain. Focusing on the quarrel between John Gibson Lockhart, a prominent *Blackwood's* contributor and John Scott, editor of the rival *London Magazine*, Murphy offers what he terms “a parable about writing and reference” (“Impersonation,” p. 626). Murphy notes the highly self-conscious nature of the use of pseudonym and personality (that is, rancorous personal attack) in *Blackwood's* – that what contributors to the magazine “say” often undercuts their status as

a speaker. He suggests that this borders on being “a strange sort of tactical warfare, aimed at destroying the world of public discourse” (p. 633). In examining a typical *Blackwood’s* “quiz” (a witty, punning, often vicious reference to persons or events) he concludes that “[t]he *Blackwood’s* experiments force us to acknowledge that the published self is a curiously unstable thing, almost impossible to control and almost impossible to bring home to some person with a body” (p. 635). The duel between John Scott and Jonathan Christie that resulted from Scott’s public denunciations of Lockhart then becomes a “parable” of the instabilities and ironies of representation.

Like Hazlitt, Murphy is sensitive to the specificities of utterance and occasion in magazines. The “parable” that he traces in the Scott–Lockhart–Christie affair is only legible to readers steeped in the working world of the magazine. As one might expect, this heightened sensitivity to historicity and the agency of individuals is purchased at some cost: it precludes, or at least postpones, larger consideration of the place of the magazine in its culture.

The difficulty presented by the sharp disparity between the systematic criticism of Mill and Klancher and the edifying approach of Hazlitt and Murphy can partly be answered by thinking of literary magazines in more broadly cultural terms, as attempts to organize the spectrum of cultural production at a time marked, according to Raymond Williams, by “the emergence of *culture* as an abstraction and absolute.”¹⁰ Where culture had once been a process, a kind of training, in the Romantic period it was increasingly becoming, both in and through the agency of the magazine, a thing in itself. Hence the task in the study of literary magazines is to investigate both the place of the magazine in culture and the place of culture within the magazine. As a purely methodological resolution, I propose in the chapters that follow to treat the run – as opposed to the entire periodical, as Mill proposes, and the author, as Hazlitt would have it – as the basic unit of study. The run, or a limited succession of numbers, will be defined in terms of a particular work or aspect of the magazine. The *London* will be examined in terms of the cultural program of John Scott’s brief editorial regime, *Blackwood’s* in terms of the collaborative series “Noctes Ambrosianae,” the *New Monthly* through the early work of Horace Smith and Cyrus Redding, and *Fraser’s* through Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus*. The treatment in each chapter will involve a kind of dialectic between an analysis of the cultural work of magazines and a description of the place of culture in the magazine.

This method of inquiry will, to borrow Mill's phrase, involve a sort of "see-saw": a continual tacking back and forth from the very particular and detailed approach of Hazlitt to the abstractions of Mill. But I think this method especially well suited for magazines, which exist in many configurations, with variations in intention and aims, in projected audience, in contributors, and in effects – often within a particular magazine and sometimes within a given number. Hazlitt's approach runs the risk of never coming to a point, of enmeshing the reader in a continual stream of anecdote and isolated fact; Mill's bold abstractions tend to dismiss the experience of reading magazines.¹¹

If a dialectic of sorts is indicated in the study of magazines, we might begin from the pole of abstraction. On one aspect of periodical writing Mill and Hazlitt agree, both embracing it apodictically: that this literature must please immediately to have success. Hazlitt displays a sardonic ambivalence toward this iron law of periodical writing: "we must please to live, and therefore should live to please." The dispassionate Mill draws a series of logical conclusions from it. Since "it must aim at that immediate applause which is bestowed only for immediate pleasure; for gratification administered to the mind in its present state; for encouragement of the favourite idea, flattery of the reigning prejudice" ("Periodical Literature," p. 210), periodical literature is not a good means of enlightening the reading public. Mill notes that a book might gain an audience over time, despite its initial fortune, but that periodicals afford no such possibility. Hazlitt, while agreeing with Mill about magazines and reviews, feels that the entire literary profession, not just the periodical sector, has become market-driven. In other words, both writers insist that periodicals and periodical writing are first and foremost commodities.

This aspect of periodicals – especially magazines as opposed to the more established reviews – puts them in sharp contrast with earlier writing of the Romantic period. Poets such as Blake, Wordsworth, and Coleridge register a protest against industrialization and materialism, and they manage to skirt these forces in their productive lives as well – Blake by a principled refusal to enter the commercial publishing world; Wordsworth and Coleridge through timely, if not lavish, benefits from patronage, both private and governmental. Periodical writers of the 1820s operate in a system of production that has been, in the terminology of economists, rationalized. Payments to contributors are made by the sheet, that is, per sixteen pages of the periodical, in a fairly tight

range across the industry. Favored contributors, such as Charles Lamb, might receive sixteen guineas per sheet; regular contributors twelve. Thomas Campbell's contract with Henry Colburn to edit the *New Monthly* stipulated only the number and kind of article – six of prose and six of poetry – he was expected to provide.¹² Moreover, this mode of production is referred to openly within the pages of the magazine: it is not occluded, as is often the case in later novels produced under the commodity system. At no point in the magazine world of the 1820s and 1830s could an article take the demystifying stance toward its mode of production that Gissing's *New Grub Street* could toward the three-decker; there is little space for the high-flown rhetoric of aesthetic idealism in the working world of magazines and reviews.

Moreover, the format of the magazine offers a suggestive parallel to what Adam Smith famously considered the motive force of the Industrial Revolution: the concept of division of labor. A quick look at the table of contents of almost any magazine of the period shows how much specialization had begun to creep into the medium. Part of this derives from the professionalization of the middle classes, in which differentiation and segmentation of occupation were crucial to achieving status. But the practice goes deeper than simply professional self-interest. We can see this ideology at work in the contradictory way that Hazlitt invokes the concept in "The Periodical Press." Hazlitt, after arguing that progress in the arts has resulted in a diffusion of artistic effort and noting that at present "Politics blend with poetry, painting with literature," concludes that "[a]ll the greatest things are done by the division of labour – by the intense concentration of a number of minds, each on a single and chosen object" (p. 354). Hazlitt provides two examples, Rembrandt and Michelangelo, the latter of which, in his own analysis, does not support his claim. That a writer like Hazlitt, not to mention an editor like Jeffrey, would let such a unconvincing presentation stand, testifies eloquently to the ideological force of the concept.

That division of labor or specialization was a given in reviews and magazines of late Romanticism is easy to document: it informs the discussions of a wide range of intellectual phenomena.¹³ This ideological commitment makes periodicals, considered historically, progressive, as opposed to other media with other conceptions of the breadth of knowledge that a public intellectual should possess. Moreover, this ideological formation is in stark contrast with that of the rest of the century, which regarded such divisions as ominous and troubling, and in which the

figure of the “Victorian Sage,” the polymath who could speak authoritatively on many subjects and thereby alleviate these anxieties, was put at a premium.¹⁴

While the text as commodity and the division of labor in the mode of production are generally apparent in periodicals of the Romantic period, these features are intensified in magazines. If the literature of the previous century – and much of that written in the first twenty years of the nineteenth century – sought “to instruct and to delight,” so do magazines of the late Romantic period, but with some renegotiation of the terms. The nature of instruction has changed. Where Samuel Johnson might note, with the authority of an entire literary tradition behind him, that “mankind need more to be reminded than instructed,” Hazlitt sees “a superabundance of raw materials” and a pressing need “to fashion and render them portable” (“The Periodical Press,” 358). And delight has become far less ineffable a category, since, as James Mill puts it, “Every motive, therefore, which prompts to the production of any thing periodical, prompts to the study of immediate effect, of unpostponed popularity, of the applause of the moment” (“Periodical Literature,” 207). Hence magazines represent, through their formal properties, a characteristically modern experience of their world, at least for the middle-class readership they address.

The basic formal features of periodicals, commodification and division of intellectual labor, have determinate effects for readers. The most important of these are the dialogism within the magazine (more specifically the heteroglossia of language), both in terms of the run and the individual number, and the dialectic in the form between what Umberto Eco has termed “open” and “closed” tendencies.¹⁵ In some ways, these features are two sides of the same coin: “dialogism” being more descriptive of the means of expression than the terms “open” and “closed,” which look to the ends. Heteroglossia, as developed by Bakhtin, concerns language on the level of the utterance. The concept assumes that language is made up of languages, each of which is the product (and in turn producer) of the experience of a social group. As Bakhtin writes in “Discourse in the Novel,” the stratification of language takes place along the lines of “social dialects, characteristic group behaviour, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of the authorities, of various circles and of passing fashions, languages that serve the specific sociopolitical purposes of the day, even of the hour.”¹⁶ Ultimately, each of these languages has its own way of understanding and representing the world.

While the contributors to literary magazines come from a rather small slice of British society, which restricts the heteroglossia of magazines in important ways,¹⁷ the division of intellectual labor nevertheless sets up its own internal dynamic among the competing languages of middle-class Britain – languages of aesthetics, of religious life, of economic life, or of the leisured gentleman. This struggle, recorded vividly in magazines, insures that a magazine carries a great variety of potential meanings, none of which can be said to be dominant.

The resulting ambiguity, in terms of the overall effect of a publication, is perhaps better approached in terms of “open” and “closed” form.¹⁸ A magazine, considered abstractly, presents readers with a field of possibilities and leaves it in large part to them to decide what approach to take or what conclusions to take away. In fact, compared with a novel or other kinds of written discourse, a magazine does little to enforce the most basic rules for closure, such as a prescribed order of perusal. Given the looseness of the reading protocols for magazines, one could imagine any number of idiosyncratic and contradictory experiences across their audiences – an unparalleled openness within the form. Yet evidence of such readerly freedom does not appear in the historical record, which would lead us to investigate the devices employed within the magazine to temper the centrifugal tendency of openness. A few of these are formal, such as the activity of a strong editor who arranges contributions to enforce certain strains of discourse within the magazine and who addresses, from a self-proclaimed seat of authority, some of the running rifts among contributors and various languages. Moreover, for regular readers of a magazine, idiosyncratic interpretations might sharply decline over time: as one reads more numbers of a magazine, even in snatches, a set of expectations might take shape to give more determinate shape to response. But perhaps most decisive in the conflict between open and closed effects is the work of ideology: the desire of the reader to have not so much the experience of openness as the opportunity for it. The closure of periodicals, the stable world they evoke, is in part a function of their readers’ preference for choice on the abstract level – their pleasure in not availing themselves of the choices offered by this conspicuously open form. Apparent freedom is part of the pleasure of the magazine.

In terms of form, the magazine in the last decade of the Romantic period mirrors the transformation of Britain in the first twenty-five years of the nineteenth century. As the new industrial order rationalizes older modes of production and recasts older social attitudes, so too does the

magazine, and as such it represents the middle-class revolution that characterizes this stage of capitalism. But it is also, as we shall see, the site of considerable resistance to the changes dictated by newer modes of production, and it is a medium through which some of the harsher aspects of this new world could be mystified as well. While the magazine represents this new order abstractly in terms of its form, it also provides, on the level of content, a forum where the terms of the middle-class order could be negotiated and promulgated.

In turning to an experience-near account of literary magazines from 1820 to 1834, we must begin with the history that impinges upon the moment. Britain was, as one historian puts it, “unprepared for peace” in 1815.¹⁹ The war ended surprisingly quickly, and the adjustments that followed were painful. The Corn Laws were enacted, to much distress and amid much protest, before Napoleon’s surrender. The next year was a bad one: poor harvests, a glut of labor, and the collapse of the immense war industry to the detriment of shipbuilding, coal-mining, and iron production.²⁰ From Waterloo through 1819, reform interests, having learned much from their defeats in the early 1790s and in 1811–12, formed the large Political Unions, which generally prepared their members for the responsibilities of suffrage. By 1818–19 these massive organizations of workmen met to carry resolutions, make petitions, and resolve to act peacefully. From our perspective, the moment of reform was a brief one. The 1819 Peterloo Massacre, at which a peaceful crowd was dispersed by a yeoman guard wielding sabers and several members of the crowd killed, prompted an anxious government to pass the Six Acts. The so-called Cato Street conspiracy of February 1820, in which Arthur Thistlewood was arrested in a plot to blow up the Cabinet, marked the end of such reform and revolutionary movements. But to those alive in 1820, at least those in the aristocracy and the middle classes, the times seemed dangerous.

Clearly one class was acting consciously in terms of its interest during the tumult of the post-war period: the landowning aristocracy. They moved decisively in 1814, passing the Corn Laws to ensure rents inflated by the wartime economy, and in 1819, with the Six Acts. But the period 1816–20 marks, for most historians, the moment at which the other classes formed a distinctive consciousness. For the working class, this consciousness is clear: begun in simple opposition to the aristocracy and middle classes, it had fairly direct aims and aspirations. The orientation of the middle classes during this formative period, however, is a matter

of debate among historians. Two schools of thought have developed: one argues that the middle class aligned itself, at least until the 1832 Reform Bill, with the insurgent working class against what was perceived as a corrupt and decadent aristocracy; the other considers the middle class as already working with the aristocracy.²¹ While one would expect accounts of a class “coming to consciousness” to be complex, both theories accept a significant split within the middle classes, between those members conforming to what the historian Harold Perkin usefully terms the “entrepreneurial” and “professional” ideals.²²

The “entrepreneurial” ideal is fairly easy to sketch, as it largely approximates the portrait of the expansionist bourgeoisie provided by Karl Marx in the first section of *The Communist Manifesto*. It insists on the primacy of the capitalist, who awakes slumbering capital or property and by his efforts provides wages for workmen. The “professional” ideal, the product of the industrial revolution and some shrewd self-policing, is more complicated. Members of this group, such as doctors, lawyers, or architects, are neither capitalists nor landowners, although they readily identify with one or the other as their interest leads them. The members of the professional middle class justified themselves and their demands on the rest of society through arguments based on merit and what might be called the ideology of the examination – a commitment to testing, certification, and professional standards. What characterizes the members of this class is “their comparative aloofness from the struggle for income” (Perkin, *Origins*, pp. 256–7), that is, their indirect relations to the market, and, more broadly, their ambiguous relation to the economic base. Significantly, most theorists of economics and class come from the ranks of the professional middle class.

Perkin calls the professional order the “forgotten class,” by which he means that their analyses of society often did not take into account their own anomalous situation. This group poses something of a problem for commentators on both class and economics. For instance, Marx’s consideration of this class in the last chapter of *Capital* is revealing: his analysis, which simply adds more “classes” for doctors and lawyers and similar professions, undercuts the powerful simplicity of his analysis, his tripartite division of society.²³ This sector of the middle class expanded greatly in the 1820s, as lawyers, doctors, and architects began to control their own accreditation through professional organizations and groups. It is from this class, as the century wore on, that disinterested analysis was expected. (One might say that through spokesmen such as both Mills and Arnold they managed to project their ideals on Victorian

society effectively.) More importantly, this sector became more and more alienated from the entrepreneurial wing of the middle class, in part because of its different relation to market forces, and in part because of its aspirations toward genteel status.

The analysis stressing collusion between aristocratic and middle-class interests downplays the effect of Perkin's entrepreneurial sector, arguing that such activity was already typical of aristocrats. Advocates of this theory stress the aggressive "agricultural entrepreneurship" of landowners, as well as heavy investment in "government funds, speculative stocks like the South Sea Company, and turnpike trusts" (Perkin, *Origins*, p. 302). Lawrence and Jeanne C. Fawtier Stone, in explaining the long ascendancy of the aristocracy in England, characterize the middle class in this way:

What makes the rise of this middling sort so crucial is their attitude towards their social superiors. Instead of resenting them, they eagerly sought to imitate them, aspiring to gentility by copying the education, manners, and behaviour of the gentry. They sent their children to boarding-schools to learn social graces, they withdrew their wives from work to put them in the parlour to drink tea, they patronized the theatres, the music-rooms, the print shops, and the circulating libraries, and they read the newspapers, the magazines, and the novels. Their attitude thus provided the glue which bound together the top half or more of the nation by means of an homogenized culture of gentility that left elite hegemony unaffected. (*An Open Elite?*, p. 291)

Clearly this describes Perkin's professional class; where the Stones' analysis differs from that of Perkin is in the importance it assigns to the entrepreneurial sector of the middle class.

Fortunately, we need not choose between these alternatives in order to profit from them. For in a sense, they are both right: what is apparent in this tumultuous period, in which the social contract is being renegotiated, is that much of the middle-class behaved largely in the way the Stones suggest. The alliance between the middle classes and the aristocracy, in essence, is codified by the 1832 Reform Bill, which addresses some of the corruption issues raised by the reform movement, but largely leaves the extension of suffrage to later bills. Although both the entrepreneurial and professional ideals are in play in middle-class economic life, the private life of this class is, as the Stones insist, imitative of the aristocracy. Literary magazines address this sector (or, in Perkin's analysis, the professional sector) of the middle class. Moreover, such magazines draw their contributors and their editors almost exclusively from this sector. Hence the concerns and aspirations of this class are the

basis for an experience-near account of literary magazines. For whatever the professed attitude a contributor to the *London* or the *New Monthly* takes toward the aristocracy as a class, the pull of gentility (or, put in its ubiquitous magazine vernacular, “respectability”) aligns the writer with it.

The aspiration toward gentility characteristic of the middle class generally is particularly trying for contributors to literary magazines. Some writers might achieve this status, such as Thomas Campbell, the leisured editor of the *New Monthly*, or John Wilson, who performed a variety of roles for *Blackwood's* (which he shrewdly combined with a University Chair to which his literary work had helped him). Others, such as Hazlitt and Thomas De Quincey, lived a hand-to-mouth existence reminiscent of Grub Street, regularly working under acute financial duress. Such struggles could be painfully obvious, as in the case of Charles Lamb, whose Elia essays often represent (or betray) anxieties about status. As a clerk in the India House whose father was a servant, reminiscences concerning “Poor Relations,” financial privation during the early years of his career, or his parents evoke all Lamb’s sensitivity and nuance as an essayist. His mystification of his father’s occupation in “The Benchers of the Old Temple” might be taken as the extreme case: Elia aligns him through quotations with Lear’s faithful and forthright retainer Kent, thereby suggesting that his father’s worldly status was a kind of disguise.²⁴ A more cruel example of the struggle for gentility would be the routine use of James Hogg, the Ettrick Shepherd, for spectacular purposes in *Blackwood's*. However resolutely the historical figure Hogg moved toward gentility, publishing his poems to some acclaim, dining at the tables of the country gentry, setting himself up as a gentleman farmer, and regaling visitors to his home with hearty (and financially ruinous) entertainment, his fellow contributors delighted in chaffing him with an urbane humor that insisted on his provinciality, rude manners, and primitive charm. That they occasionally pause to wonder at his natural wit and poetic imagination in no way alters the anxieties attendant upon this presentation.

In fact the case of Hogg is far more suggestive than that of Lamb. While Elia may evoke, through his recollections, anxieties about gentility common to many in the middle class, the treatment of Hogg presents these anxieties in action. In *Blackwood's*, the representation of Hogg is a defensive mechanism: in a world marked by the struggle for gentility, one of the weapons of class warfare is just such exclusionary activity. In denying the claims of Hogg to gentility, his middle-class detractors, the

journalistic corps of *Blackwood's*, shore up their own claims to such status by assuming the role of social arbiter. Such regulative and exclusive energy pervades the entire "Cockney School" episode, in which various *Blackwood's* writers – initially and prominently John Gibson Lockhart – mix aesthetic criticism of a group of London-based artists with personal attack. Whether they take up Leigh Hunt, Robert Benjamin Haydon, Keats, or Hazlitt, *Blackwood's* contributors seize upon lapses in taste and refinement. As in the case of Hogg, the humor can be cruel, and it often focuses on the physical characteristics or circumstances of the victim, whether it be the insistence upon Hunt's effeminacy and lubricity, ridicule of Keats's life as an apothecary's apprentice, or the reduction of Hazlitt to "an overgrown pimple, sore to the touch."²⁵

It would be a mistake to treat the eruption of such anxieties as unusual in the world of literary magazines. "The Cockney School" was the leading article in the first number of *Blackwood's* over which Lockhart and Wilson had control in April 1817, and similar outbursts feature regularly through 1824, perhaps culminating in the grotesque transformation of "pimpled" Hazlitt, who had just published an account of his affair with a servant girl in *Liber Amoris*, into the "Cockney Adonis." While writers in magazines such as the *London* or the *New Monthly* eschew such gross caricature, similar energies circulate in their writings. John Scott, in surveying the unrest of 1820, is far more likely to characterize popular reform agitation as a trespass on a middle class privilege than to examine the merits of the case. Literary magazines of the 1820s and 1830s are entangled in the struggle for gentility that is characteristic of the middle-class, at times representing it and at times enforcing it harshly. Moreover, the contributors themselves are caught up in the same forces.

Hence the world of literary magazines is a kind of arena, where what is often at stake, for both reader and contributor, is one's image. This antagonism is further encouraged by the obvious marketability of such displays. The notoriety of the April 1817 number of *Blackwood's*, which, in addition to Lockhart's "Cockney School," ran an ill-mannered attack by John Wilson on Coleridge (Wilson had recently been Coleridge's guest) and included the infamously personal "Chaldee Manuscript," produced an immediate and gratifying spike in circulation. What the *London's* John Scott, in a forgiving vein, called the "merry ruffianism"²⁶ of *Blackwood's* was enforced by the dynamics of the market as well.